

The background of the cover is a colorful illustration of three Civil War-era partisans. In the center, a man in a red jacket and a black cowboy hat stands holding a long rifle. To his left, a man in a blue jacket and a grey cap is mounted on a brown horse, holding a revolver. To the right, another man in a blue jacket and a grey cap is walking, also holding a revolver. The scene is set in a field with some foliage in the background.

CIVIL WAR

THE PARTISANS

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I'd always wanted to become a writer. I always thought it was the only thing I'd ever known. But life had that peculiar way of surprising everyone.

The country was in Civil War, and I still remembered at that time how we never really thought about it that much. People always fought for various reasons, and it's not that uncommon for some idiot here in the States to decide he'd rebel against the government for offenses that he himself only knew, could comprehend, or justify. But here we are.

Here in Missouri, the battles were first fought between neighbor against neighbor. No different from gang wars you'd see in places like Five Points. It had always been like that, but then the element of politics were added. Everyone became their own lawyer or philosopher. Everyone became part of some group. And if you were a part of the wrong group, then you're considered an enemy.

I joined the loyal Jayhawkers in the hopes of protecting my family from the violence. I'd never thought I would end up finding another thing that I'm good at besides writing during this Civil War — never thought I would find myself being good at killing.

It was a warm afternoon. I couldn't tell what unit or state they belonged to. All I knew was that they were rebel soldiers based on the confederate flags in their uniforms. They were covered in mud, one had dirty bandages around his left arm and head. The people from this town from the farm had called them ghosts, but I didn't believe that. Ghosts didn't steal eggs from the chicken coop. I'd been woken up by the sound of cracking wood, and a man swearing.

I had crawled out from under my wool blanket and crept to the window. In the garden below I saw a man had fallen into the pig's

trough. The bandaged and laughing soldier gave his comrade a hand up. They then began looking inside the house — pointing, debating.

Many soldiers came this way. The other ones had snuck into this house without much debate. They stole food, and sadly I didn't have much to spare. The soldiers then came up to the windows and peered inside. My heart raced. Were they armed? Were they friendly? Hopefully so. Maybe I could invite them in for dinner. It had been so long since I had good food. Dinner used to be a happy time but now I'm terrified of it. With a plan in my head, I ran down the stairs. The smell in the house had gotten worse, but I had gotten better at ignoring it.

I could hear the soldiers now; they were trying to force the front door. I walked quietly, keeping low in case they looked through the window again. I tried to make out their words. Their accent certainly wasn't Missourian, Mississipian, or Alabama. I reached the wall, and through a crack, I could make out the sleeve of one of their uniforms. I grabbed the bar that secured the door shut and lifted it. The two soldiers tumbled in, one falling on top of the other.

I greeted them, "Hey there, friend..."

"Who the hell are you?" the man, who had fallen into the trough, said as he stood up. He had black hair and a week's worth of stubble. His Texan accent was awful but understandable.

"I'm Eric," I answered.

"The name's Simon, and this is John," John, who was balding even though he couldn't have been older than twenty, replied as he looked around the house uneasily. Before the war this house had been beautiful.

“Y’all like to eat? I’m hungry. I got some food but no meat.”

Simon sighed and looked back to the other soldier with a shrug. “I haven’t had meat in a long, long time,” he said. “And I’m sick of anymore hard tack.”

I felt the heavy disappointment. “We came here looking for food,” Simon gave a friendly chuckle.

“I have some canned peaches in this house.”

The two soldiers exchanged a glance. Simon was whispering to John, and the latter returned back in secret. John walked to the kitchen door and was about to open it.

“No, no, the cans are here,” I said, motioning to a small cellar door under the stairs. He opened it and in the dim light the soldiers could make out the shapes of cans.

Simon peered in at the cans, some which looked rusted and dented. He forced himself in, putting his effort into focus on the promise of the sweet dessert, and not the smell of rotting meat that permeated in the house.

While Simon was busy with that, John opened the door to the kitchen. The horrid smell nearly knocked John back. Something had been rotting in this kitchen for weeks.

In the kitchen, sitting at the table, were several corpses, some wearing the same uniform as they, others wearing different sets of rebel dresses. They had been there longer than they could have imagined, their flesh so rotten the bones were becoming visible. Their eyes were gone, and their sunken sockets stared into nothingness.

As John turned around, he saw Simon, still busy trying to reach for those cans. And before John could warn him, he heard the cocking of a hammer. I was in front of him, with a double barrel shotgun pointed at him.

“Should have stayed in whatever farm you came from, king cotton....”

I then pulled the trigger. I pulled it twice.

Two weeks later, my feats in partisan warfare would reach the top brass in the Union. And soon, I would be visited by those interested in the skills. It wasn't long before I graduated from amateur to professional. Of all of them, I chose to join Captain Blazer's Scouts. There I became known as Edward Hogger... marksman... killer...

The End